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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 001132

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [MOPS](#) [RS](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: POTENTIAL IMPACT OF UNOMIG CLOSURE

REF: A. TBILISI 511
[B](#). TBILISI 1078
[C](#). TBILISI 1073
[D](#). TBILISI 322

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for Reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary and comment. Russia's veto of a technical rollover of the UN Observer Mission in Georgia leaves a significant gap in both transparency of the military situation in Abkhazia and protection of its residents, especially those in the Gali region. Nevertheless, the actual impact may be less than some fear, at least in the short term. Georgian officials believe UNOMIG was so weak that it provided little transparency or protection anyway. Other UN elements plan to continue operating in Abkhazia, as do other international partners, so the outside world will still have some perspective -- more than in South Ossetia. One tangible loss is the international community's ability to cite objective and authoritative information on Russian and Abkhaz military movements inside Abkhazia. One possible silver lining is Abkhaz de facto willingness to engage; the de facto authorities seemed sincere in their expressed interest in UNOMIG's continued presence, and they may be more open to other forms of international engagement to avoid losing too much leverage against the Russians. End summary and comment.

WHAT WE LOST . . .

[2](#). (SBU) UNOMIG maintained about 130 military monitors on both sides of the Abkhaz administrative boundary, based in Zugdidi and Gali. They conducted daily patrols along the boundary, as well as patrols into the Kodori Valley once a month or so. Although their freedom of movement was significantly reduced in the months following the Russia-Georgia war, with both Russian and Abkhaz units frequently refusing them access to specific sites or villages inside Abkhazia, they were able to observe and document significant movements by Russian, Abkhaz and Georgian forces on both sides of the boundary. In the months since UNSCR 1866 passed in February 2009, for example, UNOMIG monitors documented numerous instances of "non-respect of 1866" on both sides of the boundary, including in particular the presence of tanks, artillery, anti-aircraft systems, and armored personnel carriers on the Russian/Abkhaz side (ref A). The same monitors were able to investigate reported incidents of violence or human rights violations, such as kidnappings; although they had no authority to take any administrative or punitive actions, they could issue findings. In most cases, however, they were unable to gather enough evidence to reach any firm conclusions.

[3](#). (SBU) Attached to UNOMIG were a Human Rights Office in Abkhazia, Georgia (HROAG) and a contingent of UN police officers (UNPOL) based in both Sukhumi and Zugdidi. These officers conducted investigations on the overall human rights

and law enforcement environment in the conflict zone and helped investigate specific allegations or incidents; UNPOL often took over incident investigations initiated by the military monitors. As with investigations conducted by the military monitors, the UN human rights and police officers often had difficulty accumulating enough evidence to reach firm conclusions. Nevertheless, they were able to identify and document many key issues and concerns in Abkhazia.

14. (C) Beyond their specific mandate, UNOMIG personnel played a huge role in facilitating contact between the de facto Qa huge role in facilitating contact between the de facto authorities and the international community. Embassy travelers, for example, submitted requests for permission from the de facto authorities to enter Abkhazia through UNOMIG, and then traveled in UNOMIG aircraft and vehicles in and out of Abkhazia. UNOMIG personnel arranged itineraries for travelers and served to facilitate those meetings, even providing local transportation and interpretation services. Finally, UNOMIG personnel could intercede with de facto officials, offering a useful channel for sending informal messages back and forth.

15. (C) The Secretary General's Special Representative (SRSG) Johan Verbeke has suggested that the major loss associated with the closure of UNOMIG is the reduction in the level of attention the international community will give the conflict over time (ref B). In his view, Russia wanted to shut down UNOMIG in order to convey to the world that the conflict was resolved. Although the EU Monitoring Mission (EUMM) currently remains in Georgia as a way to remind the international community of the conflict, Verbeke thought that the EUMM would eventually leave as well (and perhaps in the

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not-too-distant future), thus leaving Georgia to fend for itself.

. . . OR DID WE?

16. (C) Georgian officials, including Foreign Minister Grigol Vashadze, have downplayed the real impact of UNOMIG's departure (ref C). They argue that the limits placed on UNOMIG's freedom of movement, combined with general timidity in the face of Russian pressure, prevented the monitors from imposing any significant check on Russian and Abkhaz behavior. Although they would generally admit that having UNOMIG in place was better than not having UNOMIG, they did not think making any compromises on key principles, such as international affirmation of Georgia's territorial integrity, was worth the tangible benefit UNOMIG brought on the ground. When asked about the possibility of a new flood of internally displaced persons (IDPs) departing Gali, a scenario that some predict (ref D), Deputy Minister of Reintegration David Rakviashvili told poloff he thought it unlikely, at least in the short term, as did Director of the Ministry of Internal Affairs' Analytic Department Shota Utiashvili.

17. (C) Although UNOMIG is closing, other UN elements will remain in Georgia, including in Abkhazia. In particular, UNHCR, which maintains one expatriate staff member in Abkhazia and others in Tbilisi who travel regularly to Abkhazia, will continue to operate. A UNHCR staff member told poloff that the Abkhaz want them to stay, and will therefore be motivated to ensure their continuing ability to transit the administrative boundary, which is now administered in part by Russian border guards. It is not yet clear, however, to what extent this considerably smaller UN presence will be in a position to take over UNOMIG's informal role as travel and communications facilitator for other international partners. Other international partners, including a number of EU-funded NGOs and assistance providers, plan to continue their involvement as well.

COMMENT: A NEW CHALLENGE -- A NEW OPPORTUNITY?

18. (C) Despite the government's protestations, it seems to post that the presence of a sizable UN presence in Abkhazia, in particular in Gali, did act as a significant restraint on Russian and Abkhaz forces. On the security side, if the Russians or Abkhaz were considering any major military actions, they had to make a conscious decision that the international attention they would face was worth the potential gains. On the human rights side, local residents themselves testified that UNOMIG's presence was the only factor restraining the Russians and Abkhaz from wholesale persecution, and that they would leave if UNOMIG ever did. To some extent, many of the human rights abuses in Gali stem from the lawless nature of the environment there, which the de facto authorities tolerate, but do not necessarily initiate; thus many of the concerns will exist whether the UN is present or not. Nevertheless, the Russians and Abkhaz will have fewer people watching now, so there will be one less reason to hold back on passportization, exclusion of Georgian language from schools, and so on. Perhaps the single most significant loss Georgia and the international community have suffered is a major reduction in our visibility on the situation in Abkhazia, which will make it difficult to determine whether things rapidly deteriorate or not. It will therefore be all the more important to maintain Qnot. It will therefore be all the more important to maintain pressure on the Russians and the Abkhaz to prevent human rights abuses and to allow access for humanitarian organizations.

19. (C) For a similar reason, however -- for fear that the Russians will have free rein in pursuing their own interests in Abkhazia -- it is possible that the Abkhaz could become more open to engagement. Abkhaz de facto officials have consistently maintained in both public and private they supported the UN's presence in Abkhazia, and post believes they were sincere in that position. Even their insistence on the removal of language about Georgia's territorial integrity from UN resolutions, which is the factor that ultimately convinced Russia to veto the latest resolution, may have been to some extent a political pose. A recent American visitor to Abkhazia, who has been traveling there for 30 years, reported that her well-connected Abkhaz contacts were unpleasantly surprised by the death of UNOMIG. With the impending departure of by far the largest international presence in Abkhazia -- the one that enabled the presence of many others -- the Abkhaz may be forced to consider increasing their flexibility in accepting visitors that do not accept the concept of Abkhaz "territorial integrity."
TEFFT